

From Color-Blind to Color Rich: Learning to Talk About Race

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What are Color-Blind Attitudes?

- Belief that being human means people are all basically the “same” or “equal”
- Belief that race and culture don’t (and shouldn’t) play a significant role in a person’s life
- Belief that when it comes to success, the most talented should (and do) rise to the top (meritocracy)
- Belief that only people of color have “culture” or are “diverse”

Draw-backs of Color-Blind Attitudes:

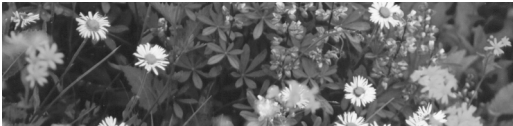
- Down-plays the values and beliefs that form the core of who we are
- Tends to ignore social systems that create obstacles to fulfilling basic needs: (belonging, security, love, meaning in life)
- Elevates majority group beliefs, values and experiences by absorbing all people into one “human” or “same” group

(Explore this idea more fully on page 7 of your hand-out)



Color-Rich Attitudes

- Acknowledge universal human qualities and needs (belonging, safety, love, meaning in life, and so on)
- Recognize that to really know another human being means acknowledging and appreciating their uniquenesses
- Acknowledge the reality of racism (individual & systemic) & the continued need for racial equity and justice in society



All things being equal?

- Take a moment to answer the 12 questions on page 3 of your hand-out.
- Take some time to reflect on these statements.
- Which statement holds the most meaning for you?
- Your time is up when the music comes to an end.



Are you Culturally Encapsulated?

- Being encapsulated means that when you are making sense of your world, interacting with others or solving problems your help comes from those that share your beliefs, values and experiences--drawing from a single perspective
- What 4 people are you closest to?
 - Do these people share your values and beliefs (world view)?
 - Do they share your religious or spiritual orientation?
 - Your race, culture or ethnicity?
 - What about your gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and class?

(Discover whether or not you are culturally encapsulated on page 5 of the Handout)

Reasons for avoiding discussion about race:

- Fear of offending others--saying "the wrong thing"
- Avoidance of being offended, hurt or demeaned
- Avoidance of being accused of "playing the race card"
- Fear of uncovering our own biases
- Fear of being seen as "racist"
- Social taboos and simply not knowing how



Ways we avoid talking about race in groups:

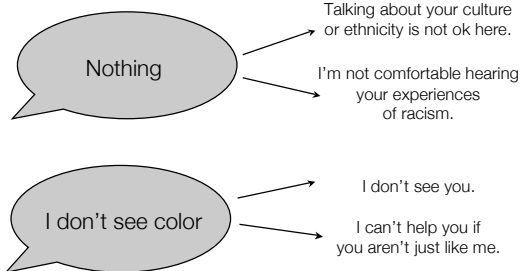
- Spending a lot of time defining the problem--leaving little time for the solution
- Raising race-related concerns near the end of a meeting
- Declaring the problem to be "too big" and making no effort at solution
- Offering alternative explanations for race related concerns
- Scape-goating or blaming the victim
- Criticizing or casting doubt on the speaker
- Changing the subject

Ways we avoid talking about race and culture:

- Down-playing the role of culture
- Discounting experiences of racism
- Pretending not to see or hear racist comments
- Declaring how much "better things are today"
- Silencing our authentic curiosity
- Culturally Encapsulating ourselves

What we say

What others hear



Bias embedded in Language

- Use of loaded words
- Thinly veiled stereotypes
- Use of qualifiers
- Use of the “passive voice”
- Ethnocentrism
- Color symbolism



(Moore, in Andersen 2004)

Racial Paranoia

- When we limit our frank discussions about race to people who are culturally similar to us we limit our understanding of the diverse range of ideas--our ideas become ill-informed
- When conversations about race are highly censored we suspect that there may be a difference between the ways others talk in private and in public about race
 - Knowing this difference exists we may become suspicious of the sincerity of what others say about race-related concerns
- As vigilance for racist commentary is raised, we can become very nervous about "saying the wrong thing"



(Jackson, 2008)

Courageous conversations

- Conversation about race and race related concerns can be productive when we are authentic and share our sincere curiosity and concerns
- Understanding others begins with self understanding--awareness of our biases and blind-spots
- Issues concerning race are deeply tied to our emotional experiencing--conversations about race are often emotional conversations

- When you think of a person "different from yourself," what comes to mind?
- What fears did you have going into this conversation?
- What did you most want to share?
- What did you experience?
- What did you learn?

- Bonilla-Silva, E., (2005). Racism without racists
- Jackson, J., (2008). Racial paranoia: The Unintentional effects of political correctness
- Moore, R., (2004). Language article. In Andersen *Race, Class, and Gender*
- Luciani, G. (19XX). Azucar (music)
